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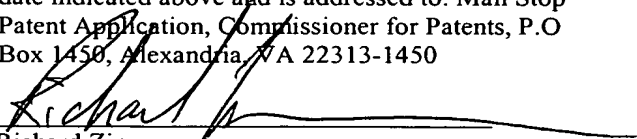
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Richard Zimmermann

APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT SPECIFICATION

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Be it known that we, Timothy D. Killinger, Gilius A. Gaska, Michael L. Pyle, John C. Carlson, and Justin Guthrie, have invented a new and useful **PORTABLE CONTAINER WITH VERTICAL HANGING FOLDER STORAGE**, of which the following is a specification.

PORTABLE CONTAINER WITH

VERTICAL HANGING FOLDER STORAGE

This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/453,493, filed on March 11, 2003.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to file organization, and more particularly to portable file organizer systems and products.

2. Description of the Related Art

Portable containers for holding office products and documents, such as brief cases and book bags, typically have either a rigid structure (e.g., a typical box-shaped brief case) or a pliable construction (e.g., a typical book bag constructed of canvas or other fabric material). While soft pliable book bags present a lightweight and stylish container for office products and documents, it is sometimes desirable to have a more rigid container for carrying files so that documents in the files are not creased or folded due to external loads to the container, such as, for example when placing the container in a storage area in a vehicle.

In addition, it is often difficult to manage hanging file folders that typically have a metal rib at the edge of each folder that can mar, scratch, or tear material in the container. It is also often difficult to quickly find a desired file if a stack of files is contained within a portable container.

The present invention is directed to solving one or more of the problems associated with the prior art.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with one aspect of the invention, a portable includes a rigid structural portion capable of holding hanging folders in a cascading configuration and a cover portion attached to the rigid structural portion. The cover portion may be attached to the rigid structural portion by at least one rod member. The outer cover portion may be attached to at least one of the rod members with flexible straps. The

cover portion may include an upper panel that may be opened to provide access to file folders disposed within the container. The rigid structural portion may include file folder hanging surfaces having variable heights so that file folders hanging from the rigid structural portion are arranged in a cascading manner. The container may also include a storage caddy having pockets for holding items such as pens. The storage caddy may be supported by webs extending inward from the rigid structural portion, such as, for example, by a web portion on each side of the storage caddy, that extends over substantially less than the entire width of the storage caddy.

In accordance with another aspect of the invention, a removable insert for providing hanging surfaces for hanging file folders of more than one size is provided. The removable insert may be constructed using metallic wire, and may include a slidable and removable member providing capability to hang letter-sized, legal sized, and both letter and legal sized hanging folders, depending on the position of the removable member.

In accordance with yet another aspect of the invention, a container for holding hanging file folders includes surfaces for supporting hanging file folders that are configured to support the hanging file folders in a cascading fashion.

The features, functions, and advantages can be achieved independently in various embodiments of the present invention or may be combined in yet other embodiments.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Objects, features, and advantages of the present invention will become apparent upon reading the following description in conjunction with the drawing figures, in which:

FIG. 1 is an exploded perspective view of a portable container for holding office products and documents according to one aspect of the invention;

FIG. 2 is a plan view of the portable container of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a front elevational view of the portable container of FIG. 1;

FIG. 4 is a side elevational view of the portable container of FIG. 1;

FIG. 5 is a perspective view of a storage caddy that may be used in a container according to the invention;

FIG. 6 is a front elevational view of the storage caddy of FIG. 5;

FIG. 7 is a plan view of the storage caddy of FIG. 5;

FIG. 8 is a side elevational view of the storage caddy of FIG. 5;

FIG. 9 is a perspective view of a wire insert that may be used to hold hanging file folders according to the invention;

FIG. 10 is a plan view of the wire insert of FIG. 13;

FIG. 11 is a rear perspective view of, showing a configuration for attaching a cover portion to a rigid structural portion;

FIG. 12 is a partial cross-sectional view, taken along lines 12-12 of FIG. 11, the portable container of FIG. 1;

FIG. 13 is a front perspective view of a second embodiment of the invention in a closed configuration, with a stabilizing device in a stowed configuration;

FIG. 14 is a front perspective view of the portable container of FIG. 13 in an open configuration with a stabilizing device in a deployed configuration;

FIG. 15 is a front perspective view of a portable container in accordance with a third embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 16 is a perspective view of a rigid structural portion of a fourth embodiment of a portable container according to the invention a wire insert for holding hanging file folders;

FIG. 17 is a perspective view of a fifth embodiment of a portable container according to the invention in a closed configuration;

FIG. 18 is a perspective view of the portable container of FIG. 17 in an open configuration; and

FIG. 19 is a perspective view of the portable container of FIG. 17 in a partially open configuration, with a cover portion open to permit access to hanging file folders that may be contained within the portable container.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DISCLOSURE

With reference initially to Figs. 1 through 8, a first embodiment of a portable container 30 includes a rigid structural portion 32 and a cover portion 34 that may be made from a pliable material, such as nylon fabric. The cover portion 34 may include a top panel 36 that may be opened using a zipper 38. The cover portion 34 gives the appearance of a soft briefcase and the rigid structural portion 32 provides a solid and strong carrier structure, together providing a lightweight and sturdy container for books, documents, file folders, and other office supplies.

The portable container 30 is particularly well-suited for carrying hanging-type file folders 40, and, as set forth in further detail below, has capability for carrying file folders 40 of various standard sizes.

A shoulder strap 42 may be attached to the rigid structural portion 32 and/or to the cover portion 34 at attachment locations 44, and may pass through openings 46 in the outer cover portion 34.

The portable container may also include a handle 48 and/or a storage caddy 50 that provides pockets 51 for pens, telephones, and other small objects. The storage caddy 50 may be supported by web portions 52 that extend partially inward from each side of the rigid structural portion 32. The storage caddy 50 may also include front and rear lower portions 54, 56 that provide a cushioned bottom surface to a front compartment 58 in front of the storage caddy 50 and also a rear compartment 60 behind the storage caddy 50. This capability may be provided, for example, by padded forward and rear foot portions 62, 64 that extend horizontally from a front vertical portion 66 and a rear vertical portion 68, respectively. The storage caddy 50 may be stiffened by a cardboard stiffener 70 or the like.

The rigid structural portion 32 may include side rails 72 and 74 that provide a capability to hold hanging file folders 40 in a cascading fashion. For example, the side rails 72 and 74 may be arranged in a stair step fashion as shown in Fig. 4 with stepped surfaces 76 provided, lips 78 on each stepped surface 76 prevent folders from sliding off of the stepped surfaces 76.

A removable wire insert 80 may be provided as shown in Figs. 9 and 10, in order to provide hanging capability as well as additional structural rigidity to the container 30.

The wire insert 80 may include a removable movable adaptor 82 that provides the capability to hold standard letter size and/or legal size hanging folders. The wire insert 80 and the adaptor 82 may include a protective coating, such as a plastic coating, for example, if desired. With the adaptor 82 in a first position as shown in solid lines in Fig. 10, the wire insert 80 may accept both letter size hanging folders and legal size hanging folders. With the adaptor in a second position, as shown in phantom (dashed) lines in Fig. 10, the adaptor 82 permits the wire insert 80 to support letter size folders only, and with the adaptor completely removed, the wire insert 80 will support legal sized folders only. Thus, the wire insert 80 and the adaptor 82 provide a convenient and readily adaptable way to support hanging folders of one or both of the common standard sizes, in a cascading fashion. When not in use, the wire insert 80 and the adaptor 82 may each or both be conveniently stowed in the container 30, as they both have a low profile.

The cover portion 34 may be attached to the rigid structural portion as shown in Figs. 11 and 12, by means of a rod member 84. The rod member 84 may be secured in a channel-shaped recess 86, with openings 88 to accommodate elastic straps 90 that may be used to attach the rod member 84 to the cover portion 34. To install the rod member 84, the elastic straps 90 may be stretched so that the rod member 84 clears a lip portion 92 of the channel-shaped recess 86. The rod member 84 may be constructed from any suitable material, such as, for example, steel, plastic, or wood.

With reference to FIG. 13 and FIG. 14, a second embodiment of the invention comprises a portable container 130 having a rigid structural portion 132 and a rigid cover portion 134, both of which may be manufactured from a plastic material. The cover portion 134 may be hingedly attached to the rigid structural portion 132, and the rigid structural portion 132 may include side rails 172, 174 each having a plurality of steps 176 to support hanging file folders in a cascading configuration. The portable container 130 may also include a stabilizing device 194 that may be rotated from a

stowed position, as shown in FIG. 10 to a deployed position, as shown in FIG. 11, in order to provide additional stability to the portable container 130, for example, if it is being used in a vehicle. The portable container 130 may include a handle 148 and a shoulder strap 142.

A third embodiment of the invention is shown in FIG. 15, in which a portable container 230 includes a rigid structural portion 232 and a cover portion 234. The rigid structural portion 232 may include integral slots 272 and 274 such that the rigid structural portion can support both letter sized and legal sized hanging file folders.

As shown in FIG. 16, according to fourth embodiment of the invention, the wire insert 80 and adaptor 82 are shown in a rigid structural portion 332 in FIG. 16 in a configuration such that both letter sized hanging file folders and legal sized hanging file folders are supported by the wire insert 80 and the adaptor 82. As is seen in FIG. 16, the wire insert 80 and the adaptor 82 each has a stepped geometry, providing the capability to support hanging file folders in a cascading manner.

FIGS. 17 through 19 depict a fifth embodiment of the invention in which a portable container 430 includes a rigid structural portion 432 and a cover portion 434. The entire cover portion 434 may be open to expose the entire interior of the rigid structural portion 432, as shown in FIG. 18. The cover portion 434 may include a top panel 436 that may be opened by means of a zipper 438 to provide access to hanging file folders contained within the portable container 430, as shown in FIG. 19. The rigid structural portion 432 may include sloped side rails 472 and 474, for supporting hanging file folders in a cascading configuration.

Of course, and although not depicted in the drawing figures, if desired, wheels, and a retractable pull handle may be provided for any of all of the foregoing embodiments of the invention.

Although certain file organizer systems and products have been described herein in accordance with the teachings of the present disclosure, the scope of coverage of this patent is not limited thereto. On the contrary, this patent covers all embodiments of the teachings of the disclosure that fairly fall within the scope of permissible equivalents. For example, although surfaces for supporting hanging file

folders have been shown herein as having either a stair step or sloped geometry, other geometries are of course possible, including convex and concave curved shapes.